



U.S. Embassy

Press Release

September 29, 2004

U.S. Coast Guard Seizes Massive Amount of Cocaine

In a demonstration of the smooth and successful application of the Agreement between the Government of Belize and the Government of the United States of America concerning Maritime Counter-Drug Operations, the United States Coast Guard, with the cooperation of the Government of Belize, seized the Belize flag fishing vessel San Jose in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, confiscated its cargo of 25,000 pounds of cocaine, and arrested its crew of eight Colombian nationals. Just days earlier, the Coast Guard seized the Cambodia flag vessel Lina Maria, confiscated its cargo of 30,000 pounds of cocaine, and arrested its crew of ten.

The American Embassy in Belize wants to express its appreciation to Mr. Angelo Mouzouroupoulos and the staff of the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE) and Mr. Gian Gandhi, Registrar of Merchant Marine of Belize, for their cooperation and support, which helped to make possible the seizure of the Belize flag fishing vessel San Jose, confiscation of 25,000 pounds of cocaine, and the arrest of its crew.

Below is an official press release from the United States Coast Guard:

Record Cocaine Seizure Caps Record Year

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Coast Guard made the largest single cocaine seizure in its history followed by the third largest seizure, in back to back seizures last week. The first happened Sept. 17 when Coast Guard and Navy forces discovered more than 30,000 pounds of cocaine aboard the fishing vessel Lina Maria approximately 300 miles southwest of the Galapagos Islands. A second Coast Guard and Navy team caught up with the Lina Maria's sister ship, the fishing vessel San Jose, 1000 miles south of Manzanillo, Mexico, Friday, and seized an additional 25,000 pounds.

This brings the total cocaine seized by the Coast Guard this year to a record 227,019 pounds, worth approximately \$7.2 billion. The previous annual record of 138,393 pounds was surpassed May 29 with the seizure of 4,300 pounds of cocaine off a go-fast vessel in the Eastern Pacific.

"Vastly improved intelligence sharing, more coordinated operations with our enforcement and intelligence partners, and better resources meant our cutter and aircraft crews are increasingly finding themselves in the right place at the right time, with

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the right capabilities to detect and intercept any threat," said Adm. Thomas H. Collins, commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. "The Coast Guard is committed to denying the seas to those who wish to harm our citizens, and this disruption of the illegal drug trade is part of our successful, layered homeland security strategy."

Other significant seizures contributing to this year's totals were 11,071 pounds seized on the motor vessel Don Isaac, 410 miles northwest of the Galapagos Islands and 10,066 pounds seized on the motor vessel San Juanero, 410 miles south of Acapulco, Mexico; both interdicted by the Coast Guard Cutter Midgett, homeported in Seattle, and 9,988 pounds seized from a go-fast vessel 265 miles southwest of Manzanillo, Mexico by the Coast Guard Cutter Sherman, homeported in Alameda, Calif.

The Coast Guard's largest single cocaine seizure prior to the Lina Maria and San Jose was 26,397 pounds seized aboard the Svesda Maru in May 2001, 600 miles south of Acapulco.

These seizures were the result of coordination by Joint Interagency Task Force South, DEA, FBI, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, the Departments of Justice, State and Homeland Security, and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Investigation in southern Florida, and the exceptional cooperation from the governments of Cambodia and Belize.

USS Curts intercepted the Lina Maria and USS Crommelin interdicted the San Jose; both vessels were boarded by an embarked Coast Guard law enforcement detachment. The team discovered the bales hidden in a sealed ballast tank on board the Lina Maria and took 10 crewmembers into custody. The cocaine was found in a fish hold buried under ice and fish on board the San Jose and eight crewmembers were taken into custody. The U.S. Attorney indicted the crewmembers of the Lina Maria in Tampa, Fla., today for their alleged roles in the attempted smuggling of the cocaine.

John Walters, director of National Drug Control Policy stated, "I commend all the federal agencies involved that have contributed to this successful effort. Every ton of cocaine seized is a ton of cocaine kept off of our nation's streets and away from our children. Drug use in America is declining and we hope to continue these declines by pursuing effective programs that reduce both the demand and supply of drugs."

(End United States Coast Guard Statement)